

THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN.¹ GENESIS VI.

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Prophecy of the future, the present, the past.—Introductory questions relating to the story of the sons of God and the daughters of men.—The sons of God, who were they?—Other important scriptural expressions in the passage.—The outside material in reference to angels, demons, giants.—The results of the comparison.—The purpose of the introduction of this story.

The word "prophecy," it should be remembered, is of wider meaning than is usually accepted. The great aim of the prophet was to communicate to the people about him divine instruction. In each case he had received the principles which as a prophet he was to teach the people of his time. In conveying to them these great religious truths, different methods were employed. At times he tells them of the future consequences of sin, the future rewards of a life in accordance with the divine will; he pictures what will surely happen to them as individuals and as a nation if this or that course of conduct is continued. His words of promise based upon a knowledge of the divine will communicated to him were intended to encourage or deter. All this was prophecy in the realm of *the future*.

At other times he was the reformer of his day, dealing with the present situation and imploring the people to accept righteous government instead of corrupt, a policy of charity rather than of injustice. When he pleads the cause of the widow and the orphan,

¹The literature: *Dods*, Genesis; *Kalisch*, Genesis; *Dillmann*, Die Genesis; *Delitzsch* (Franz), Genesis; *Lange*, Commentary on Genesis; *The Pulpit Commentary*, Genesis; *Lenormant*, Beginnings of History, chapters 5, 6; *Schrader*, The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament; *Harper and Green*, The Pentateuchal Question, Genesis i-xii, Hebraica, Vol. V; *Ewald*, History of Israel, Vol. I; *Budde*, Die biblische Urgeschichte; *Geikie*, Hours with the Bible, Vol. I, chapter 12; *Goldziher*, Mythology among the Hebrews; *Kling*, Akkadian Genesis; *Smith*, Bible Dictionary, articles on the various names in the chapter.

when he rebukes the drunkard, when he forces out of office a corrupt official, when he utters stinging words against the monopolist, we have what may be called prophecy of *the present*. At still other times the prophet's preaching takes up events of the past. These are selected and arranged in such a way as to present most forcibly the message given him to teach. It is from this point of view that the patriarchal stories have been transmitted to us. Each narrative is a prophecy, a story written to convey religious truth; the example of an honored ancestor is held up to the people of a later time, and according as his conduct was good or bad the great lesson of religious truth is taught. There is more of prophecy of the past in the Old Testament by far, than prophecy of the future. If it were possible for us to realize that the narratives of Genesis, Exodus, Judges, Samuel, Kings were prophecies of the past, many difficulties would be removed and the great purpose of these writings more clearly appreciated.

All this bears directly upon the narrative of *the Sons of God and the Daughters of Men* in Genesis 6:1-8.

I. Some of the preliminary points to be considered are :

1. *The sources of the material*.—Here we must include, besides the prophetic story itself, all references in the Old Testament to angels and giants, and all traditions among outside peoples relating to these subjects.

2. *The structure and character of the passage*.—It is to be noted, (1) that verses 1 to 4 form an introduction to the Deluge, while verses 5 to 8 also serve as an introduction; (2) that in verses 1 to 4 we are given the origin of the Nephilim, who are living at the time of the Exodus (Numbers 13:33), and of the heroes, one of whom was Nimrod; and yet there shortly follows the deluge, in which all mankind except Noah's family perish.

II. *The Biblical Material*.—1. The period in which the event occurred was "when men began to multiply," (the word "men" being indefinite, and including both Sethites and Cainites) and when "daughters were born to them" (v. 1). To whom; to men of both lines?

2. Who were the sons of God? There is perhaps no more disputed verse in the Book of Genesis. Among other sugges-

tions we may note the following: (1) They were simply *men*, called "sons of God" because created in the image of God. (2) They were descendants of Cain who called themselves "sons of God" because of their "commercial enterprises." (3) They were persons of high rank (*cf.* Psalm 82:6), and the sin lay in the corruption by the higher ranks of the wives and daughters of their dependants. This is a favorite Jewish view, as seen in the Targums, and in the writings of Aben Ezra, Rashi, and Kimchi, but it cannot be shown that the phrase ever has this meaning, and the contrast between men of high rank and women of low rank is not justified. (4) They were a non-Adamic race who were sons or worshipers of the gods, *i. e.*, idolaters. (5) They were the "sons of Seth," and, although men of a godly line, were ensnared by women of the wicked line. They were called "sons of God" because they had adhered to the service of the true God. This view was held by Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Luther, Calvin. It is urged in its favor that it is a natural view, not a monstrous one; that it is scriptural, not mythical; that it is in accordance with the designation of the pious; that the phrase "Take in marriage" refers to an actual and lasting contract; that Seth was regarded by his mother as a son of God. In opposition to it we are told that this interpretation introduces too early the idea of the fatherhood of God; that the phrase "Daughters of men" must include all women of both lines; that the term "sons of God" is in contrast with the "daughters of men," the two terms being exclusive; that the marriage of godly men and ungodly women would not account for the birth of mighty men of renown. (6) The "sons of God" are angels, who, moved to envy by the happiness they see on earth, take human form and marry the daughters of men. In favor of this interpretation we are told that the ordinary meaning of the phrase is "angels" (*cf.* Job 1:6, 2:1, 3:7-8, Ps. 29:1, 89:7); that the daughters of men must be those mentioned in v. 1; that the offspring of the marriages is monstrous and abnormal; that ordinary promiscuous marriages could not account for the deluge. As in favor of this view there are cited Philo, Josephus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others of the fathers; the apocryphal Book of

Enoch, and it is thought to be implied in Jude, vss. 6-7,¹ and II Peter, 2 : 4.²

Among the modern authorities who have adopted this view are Gesenius, Ewald, Kalisch, Delitzsch. Against this view it is urged that angels could not have had carnal intercourse with women, and that the whole idea is an apocryphal fable. According to Kalisch the idea would be as follows : "The angels discarded their pure and ethereal nature and abandoned themselves to despicable depravities. They left heaven in order to corrupt the earth and themselves, and it is but natural that their wicked sons, excluded from the abodes in heaven which their fathers had enjoyed, should attempt to force access to it by a desperate and flagitious assault."

3. "*My spirit shall not strive with man forever.*" In this phrase the meaning of the word "spirit" will be determined by the general sense taken of the passage. By some it is understood to mean the vital principle breathed into man which distinguishes him from the animal ; by others, the Holy Spirit. There is perhaps no more doubtful word in the Book of Genesis than that which is translated "strive." One of the greatest of Semitic scholars has pronounced it inexplicable. There is good authority for the translations "act," "dwell," "be low," and "prevail" or "rule."

4. "*For that he also is flesh.*" Here again we have a most difficult phrase. With this translation it would seem to mean that man had become identical with flesh, and this taken ethically would indicate sensuousness. An entirely different translation gives the thought, "in his going astray man chose to be entirely sensuous." The idea, however, is practically the same in either case.

5. "*His days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*" According to Josephus, Ewald, and many others, the limit of life is now

¹ "For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, etc."

² "And angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication, and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire."

reduced. From this time forward the outside limit of human life shall be one hundred and twenty years, in striking contrast with the hundreds of years which the patriarchs have lived. But according to the Targums and Luther one hundred and twenty years was not the limit. Did not Sarah live one hundred and twenty-seven, Abraham one hundred and seventy-five, Isaac one hundred and eighty, and Jacob one hundred and forty-seven? The whole context here refers to the deluge. The phrase should be interpreted to mean that one hundred and twenty years is given as a respite and time for repentance. The ideal character of the number is seen in that it consists of three times forty, the latter being the number symbolical of waiting and transition.

6. "*The Nephilim were in the earth in those days.*" The persons referred to are generally understood to have been giants or fallen spirits; according to Luther, "tyrants." The sense of the passage is, that while creatures of this class existed before the marriages referred to, some of them owe their origin to the inter-marriage of the sons of God and the daughters of men.

7. "*Mighty Men.*" Here we should note the existence of heroes in the Hebrew tradition, the word translated "mighty men" being susceptible of this rendering, and with these we may compare the heroes of Homer and Hesiod. They belong to the earliest age and they are men of renown, much talked about, "famous in popular legends." "These are the men who are popularly called the heroes and about whom all the well-known stories are told." Here we may ask the question raised by Lenormant; is this allusion intentional? is the writer endeavoring to shift responsibility? is it made in order to exhibit caution? is he now merely the recorder of a human tradition? And it is not unfair to quote from Plato the statement, "Do you know that the heroes are demigods? All of them spring either from the love of a god for a mortal woman or of a mortal man for a goddess."

III. *The Outside Material.* It seems necessary under this head to summarize the more important references. Every one is familiar with the Chaldeo-Babylonian system of heavenly and

earthly spirits. In the Persian traditions, Ahriman and his evil spirits entered creation, corrupted the purity of the world, defiled nature, deformed beauty and filled the earth with crime. Before Zoroaster came there was great corruption of morals, but he dashed to pieces the bodies of the angels because they had engaged in amatory dealings with earthly women. Djemshid married the sister of a demon, and the offspring were monstrous giants, black and impious. Among the Hindus the children of illegitimate marriages are always false and wicked. Greek and Roman mythology sings continually of loves between gods and women. Herodotus makes the statement that the Egyptians are the only people who do not believe this. Into the details of demonology among the Assyrians and Persians, it is impossible to enter. The material which relates to giants is so large that only brief mention may be made of the more important items. We are told that "among the Hindus the giants are the enemies of the Gods, polluting their sacrifices, some, like wild beasts, eager for blood and human flesh, haunting the forests and cemeteries; pious hermits are incessantly compelled to invoke against them the assistance of intrepid heroes." Their number is also increasing,—since the souls of criminals are compelled to enter them at death. Among the Chinese they are the authors of crime and rebellion "who long waged war against virtuous kings." Among the Greeks primitive men were regarded as giants; the traditions of a race of giants in the island of Rhodes are found and the Odyssey refers to Eurymedon as king of the giants.

Classic poetry seems to take it for granted that the early heroes were giants. The Chaldean traditions make the first men giants and allow them to remain such until after the deluge. Arabic traditions also make the first inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula giants. The fourth book of Ezra tells us that the stature of man has been growing less ever since the deluge. The Talmud tells us that Adam was a giant of prodigious size. This idea was taught by Augustine. Are all these traditions fabulous? Science informs us that since history began the human race has not changed its form. Men have lived who were eight or nine feet high, but no nation of such men has existed.

The Jews of early ages believed, as did all other nations, in the existence of giant nations. We should not be surprised at this fact. It was the common belief of antiquity. In the classic stories we seem¹ "to come into view of dim traditions exaggerated through the mist of dim ages of pre-Hellenic barbarians, godless, cannibal, skin-clothed, hurling huge stones in their rude warfare. Giant legends of this class are common in Europe and Asia where the big and stupid giants have often every token of uncouth native barbarians, exaggerated into monsters in the legends of the later tribes who dispossessed and slew them."

IV. *The Results of our comparison.*

1. It seems probable that the biblical story of the sons of God and the daughters of men has a common origin with outside stories which relate to the angels coming into relation with women, to demonology and to giants.

2. The difference between the Hebrew story and the outside stories is very evident. According to Delitzsch, our writer has reduced to their germ of fact the obscene stories heathen myths depict. He degrades to sons of god, the gods of the heathen myths.

3. The character of this material. It seems quite certain that the story which we have studied is not history; that it does not contain scientific material. The story is something which our writer finds at hand. As he finds it, it is a legend. He purifies it. But more than this, he transforms it; still further, he refuses to acknowledge it; he merely cites it and that with caution. "He does not set forth a history of a positive character, but makes use of the widely spread legend to bring it into relation with the great truths he has been trying to teach.' Israel's stock of material was of two kinds: institutions and ideas. The institutions of slavery and polygamy, the ceremony of circumcision, the law of the clean and unclean, the various festivals, seasons,—all this came to Israel from outside nations; all were purified and regulated. In just such a manner stories, in existence before Israel was a nation, come into Israel's possession. These stories exert either a good or a bad influence. Those who

¹ Encyclopædia Britannica.

were divinely commissioned to lead forward the nation in its religious work must deal with these institutions and these ideas; consequently the story which we have been considering was introduced.

4. *Its connection with what precedes and follows.* It is introductory to the story of the deluge. It tells as nothing else could tell the corruption and sin which filled the world; for which the world must suffer.

5. *The purpose.* The following statement is a condensation of the material of Kalisch and Lenormant. The superstition contained in this story is admitted by the narrator for a moment in order forever to subvert and eradicate it. Men had been sinning because of the example of the angels, but these angels are destroyed by the deluge, and henceforth man has no such example of vice; temptation will come from himself. The Hebrews had many such heroic legends, similar to those of outside nations, as, for example, that of Nimrod. But these are studiously avoided by the sacred writers. Genealogical tables are given in order to keep out these heroic legends. The stories of the heroes are rejected, yet they exist, and Israel must be warned against them. The heroes are, therefore, referred to in this story and in the references, stigmatized with reprobation. Those whom the popular legend admires, calls *men of glory*, our writer shows to have incurred the displeasure of God, and to have been a source of the world's great calamity. One of the essential traits of these heroes among outside nations was the fact of their springing from the loves of the gods and mortal women. But with the monotheistic conception which dominated the Hebrew mind, and which assured to Jehovah an incontestable predominance over the strange gods which were associated with him by many of the people; with the manner in which Jehovah, even when the idea of his purely spiritual essence was overshadowed by the obtrusion of impure and gross elements, stood distinct from all the gods of the nations in his character of a god without a spouse, who was said never to have entered upon the conjugal state; with the special characteristic of the religious spirit of Israel—the divine loves whence issued the heroes of the Pagan peoples, are trans-

ferred into the world of beings intermediate between God and mankind, namely, that of the angels created by him, and of much purer and higher nature than man. It is gods who beget the heroes, the giants, in the Pagan world; it is angels only in the Hebrew conception.

However we understand it, and let us not be so lacking in candor as to deny the extreme difficulty of the whole story, three or four things seem to be true. (1) There is nothing here to contradict the Bible conception of angels, for they are everywhere described as impure in comparison with God. (2) There is nothing here to throw discredit upon the biblical conception of God, for the writer is careful to avoid all reference to the Deity. (3) There is here a passing reference to the idea common to antiquity, undoubtedly familiar to every Hebrew, an idea most degrading in its character, most ruinous in its influence. It is necessary that it be touched; touched lightly to be sure, yet in such a manner as to show most clearly the baneful and injurious nature of the belief. (4) It is taken as the form through which to express a truth of great importance. It furnishes the explanation of that great catastrophe, the deluge. It is another example of the consequences, the terrible consequences of sin. Could anything be more awful? Shall not men see and fear? This was the way in which it came to be introduced. This was the lesson it was intended to teach. Have men shut their eyes, and, because of a self-imposed blindness, a blindness that will not see, failed to read in this strange story this great truth? Then they are responsible and not the prophet who wrote it, nor the God who guided him in the writing of it.